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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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UNHCR ACTIVITIES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS: REPORT FOR 1994-1995 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET FOR 1996

PART V. SOUTH WEST ASIA NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Section 13 - Regional Special Programmes

(submitted by the High Commissioner)

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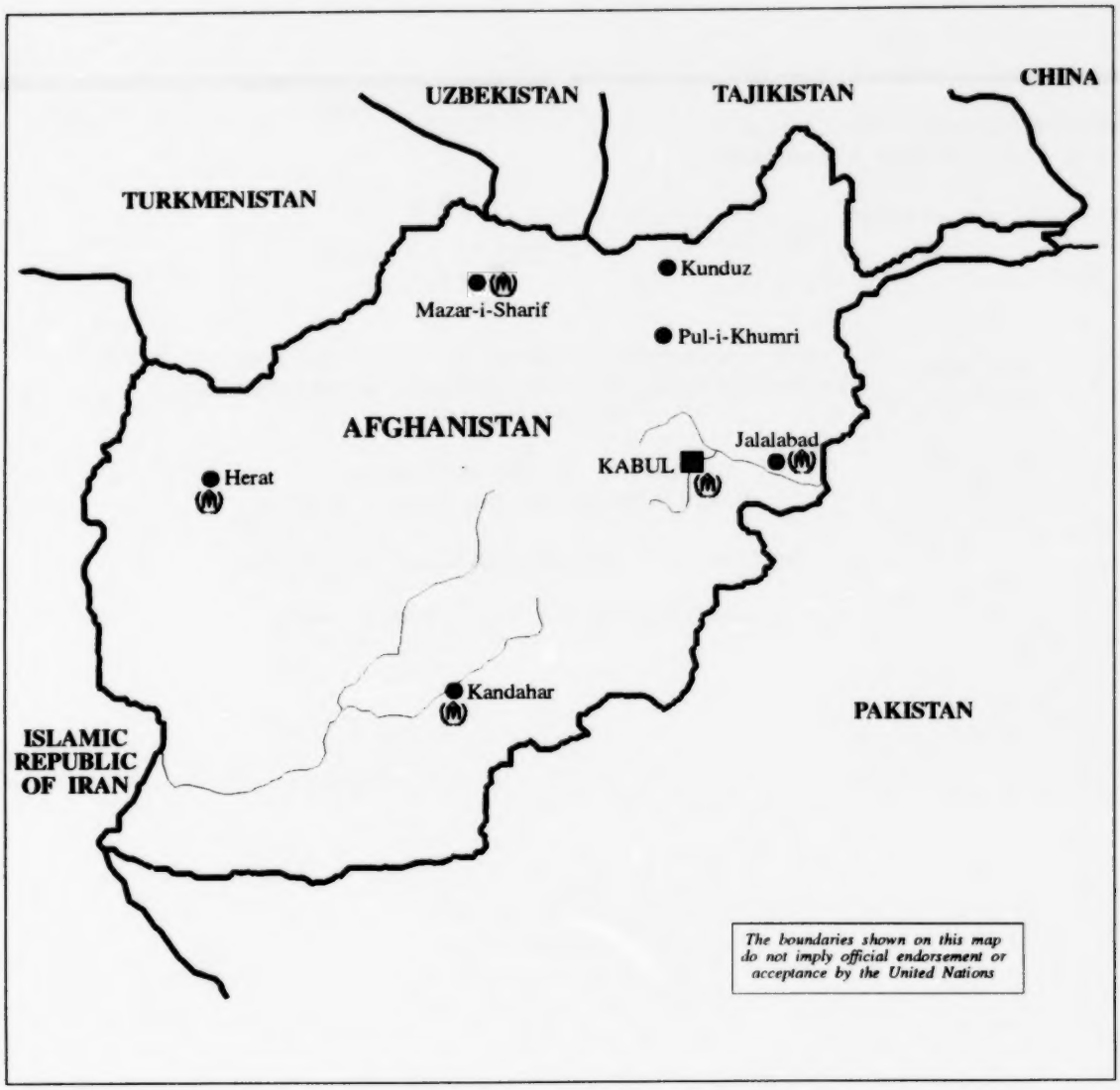
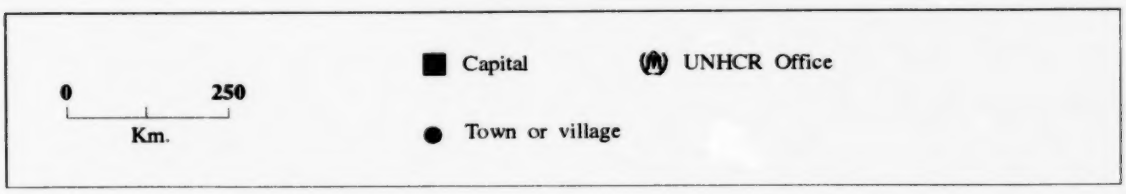
AFGHANISTAN





V.13 REGIONAL SPECIAL PROGRAMMES

A. Afghanistan Repatriation

1. Beneficiary population

1. At 31 December 1994, 329,400 refugees had returned to Afghanistan during the year, joining more than 3 million refugees who had returned between 1990 and 1993. The return during 1994 comprised 226,700 from the Islamic Republic of Iran (of whom 121,400 were assisted by UNHCR) and 102,700 from Pakistan (of whom 32,000 were assisted by UNHCR). Much of the return has occurred to provinces bordering Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to the northern provinces of Kunduz and Baghlan. Repatriation remains the preferred durable solution for the 2.6 million Afghans remaining in neighbouring countries, although attainment of self-reliance in countries of asylum continues to be another option.

2. Developments in 1994 and 1995

2. An uncertain security situation and funding problems contributed to a lower than expected implementation rate in 1994. A total of 139 quick impact projects (QIPs) were implemented by the Office of the Chief of Mission through its Sub-Offices in Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif. Activities included the rehabilitation of 13,700 shelters, the reconstruction of schools, the provision of educational equipment, the repair of irrigation systems, drinking water schemes, vocational training, the repair of cultural facilities and income-generation projects. Assistance to return from neighbouring countries of asylum continued in the form of repatriation grants from Pakistan (the equivalent of $ 110 in cash and 300 kilograms of wheat per family) and from the Islamic Republic of Iran (the equivalent of $ 25 in cash and 50 kilograms of wheat per person). Assisted transport, organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), continued in the Islamic Republic of Iran up to the Afghan border but was severely restricted in Afghanistan because of insecure routes and bad road conditions.

3. In response to the 1994 Executive Committee Conclusion on Repatriation to Afghanistan (A/AC.96/839, para. 32), UNHCR has pursued a policy of intensifying activities in the safe areas to create conditions conducive to the return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin. The 1995 programme represents a new approach that will continue over a three-year period. It is anticipated that, by the end of 1997, the UNHCR presence in Afghanistan will have been progressively phased down in favour of development-oriented United Nations agencies. The security situation in much of the countryside to which the refugees are returning has been relatively stable. Through an increased presence in key areas of the country, UNHCR can contribute to the establishment of stability that is a prerequisite for the sustainable return of refugees and their successful reintegration. UNHCR has been present in Kabul since 21 March 1995 as part of a permanent United Nations response team. Additional funds have been targeted for QIPs, with 49 being executed during the first quarter of 1995. Missions have been undertaken by senior Headquarters staff to meet with the Governments of the Islamic

Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, United Nations New York, the World Bank, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank to seek their views and to mobilize support for a new approach to repatriation.

4. To ensure the voluntary character of repatriation, UNHCR has continued to maintain a staff presence at border crossings and along routes of return. The Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, in cooperation with UNHCR, have established two tripartite commissions on voluntary repatriation to facilitate the return and successful reintegration of Afghans from neighbouring countries. These commissions are convened regularly. At the invitation of UNHCR, representatives of the Afghan, Iranian and Pakistani Governments met in Geneva in April 1995 and agreed to establish an ad hoc intergovernmental consultative group that will advance mutual concerns related to repatriation and advocate increased rehabilitation to sustain the return. The group will mobilize support and provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the international community for development assistance to all parts of Afghanistan.

3. 1996 country programmes

(a) Objectives

5. The UNHCR Branch Office in Pakistan and the Office of the UNHCR Chief of Mission in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in coordination with the Office of the Chief of Mission in Afghanistan, will continue to pursue opportunities for voluntary repatriation. UNHCR will facilitate repatriation through the provision of direct assistance at the time of return and by responding to essential needs in an attempt to promote successful reintegration. Assistance to return will continue to be provided in cooperation with WFP and IOM. Composition of the assistance package in the Islamic Republic of Iran will consist of cash ($ 25 per person), food (50 kilograms per person) and subsidized transport. Assistance from Pakistan will be reviewed in the second half of 1995 and will possibly be adjusted to the prevailing situation to ensure closer linkage between assistance and return. Projected levels of return for 1996 have not yet been established by the Tripartite Commissions. The preliminary estimate, however, is to assist 250,000 persons from Pakistan and 500,000 persons from Islamic Republic of Iran. Following an assessment of the rate of return in 1995, and based on the prevailing political and security situation, the planning figures will be reviewed in early 1996.

6. UNHCR will increase its presence and programmes in Afghanistan to encourage regional stability and to support continued return. In rural areas experiencing high repatriation, shelter, water, crop production and irrigation will be priorities, since they are immediate life-sustaining activities. In urban areas, where the returnee population is better established, sanitation, community services, education and income generation will be the priorities. Particular emphasis will be placed on programmes that address the needs of women and children. The principal means of implementing rehabilitation projects will be through QIPs in cooperation with NGOs and other United Nations agencies.

7. Monitoring the safety of return and the process of reintegration will continue to be undertaken by UNHCR staff members present at major border crossing points into Afghanistan and within communities of return in Afghanistan where rehabilitation activities have already been initiated. UNHCR will seek to identify obstacles to repatriation as they occur by monitoring the return and reintegration process, and will intervene where necessary with the relevant authorities to ensure remedial action. It is recognized by the regional Governments and by UNHCR that the reasons which provoked the initial displacement of refugees to neighbouring countries ceased to exist with the departure of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989 and the establishment of a new Government in Afghanistan in April 1992. The slow rate of return is due primarily to economic considerations; in the majority of cases, Afghans returning to safe areas do not face undue security risks.

8. UNHCR has initiated negotiations with the authorities in Kabul for the declaration of a general amnesty by the Government of Afghanistan. The amnesty is intended to cover all Afghan nationals, be they refugees abroad or internally displaced persons. Similarly, respect for the basic rights of returnees and acceptance of legal issues arising out of their return, such as mixed marriages and school certificates, will be pursued with the relevant authorities. Training of government officials and NGO personnel on the principles of voluntary repatriation as well as wider dissemination of these principles will be carried out.

(b) Proposed budgets for 1996

9. The regional programme for repatriation to Afghanistan will include components for direct assistance to returnees from neighbouring Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as reintegration activities for communities in Afghanistan that will be affected by the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Funding for the UNHCR programme is a component of the consolidated inter-agency appeal to be released by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA) for the period from October 1995 to September 1996.

10. The number of returning Afghan refugees from Pakistan has been declining since the large-scale repatriation in 1992 that saw more than 1.2 million persons cross the border. Twelve years of war followed by factional fighting and continued uncertainty in Afghanistan has caused many refugees to consider alternative options. Increasing economic self-sufficiency for much of the refugee population has resulted in reduced needs and a consequent gradual decrease in the care and maintenance programme in refugee villages. Economic and trade links between refugee villages in Pakistan and rural areas in Afghanistan increasingly make conditions more conducive to a sustainable return. Due to the phase-out of food assistance in refugee villages, the use of the ration book as a document for repatriation assistance may have to be reconsidered.

11. The current projection is to assist with the return of 250,000 persons, although this level has not yet been agreed to by the Tripartite Commission. The budget is based on the requirements to assist with the return in 1995 of an

estimated 150,000 persons. A revised budget will be prepared following the 1995 repatriation season based on actual return figures, agreed changes in the composition of the assistance package and its mechanism of delivery.

12. Much of the return from the Islamic Republic of Iran has been to the western provinces of Afghanistan, which have remained relatively unaffected by the ongoing conflict in Kabul. Confronted with reduced subsidies for health and education, refugees have been informed by the Iranian authorities that they must move out of urban areas and either repatriate or be relocated to camps. Due to a high rate of unemployment, refugees face increased restrictions in finding jobs. These factors indicate that repatriation from the Islamic Republic of Iran is likely to increase, and current projections for 1996 are that up to 500,000 persons may need to be provided with direct assistance. The repatriation package will continue to consist of cash ($ 25 per person) and food (50 kilograms per person) with plastic sheeting provided to families and internal transport organized by IOM to the border crossing.

13. Assistance in Afghanistan will continue to be structured around QIPs. Reintegration activities will focus on survival and the immediate needs of persons in the provinces who are receiving refugees and internally displaced persons. Projects will aim to increase the capacity of rural water supply for drinking and irrigation and support NGO and United Nations efforts in health and education. Income-generation activities will target assistance for women, widows and the disabled. In the urban areas, attention will be given to the improvement of sanitation in coordination with specialized agencies, and to the strengthening of community services and cultural institutions. Road rehabilitation QIPs will seek to improve village-to-market access, thereby stimulating the rural economy. This amount will be the subject of a review by UNHCR in preparation for the consolidated inter-agency appeal for Afghanistan.

(c) **Implementing partners**

14. UNHCR Afghanistan has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNDP and is in the process of formulating a series of similar agreements with other United Nations agencies to provide greater coordination and to ensure closer cooperation for the joint implementation of rehabilitation projects. Activities in health and education have been designed increasingly for joint agency participation with UNICEF and WHO, while rehabilitation projects incorporate the technical expertise of UNDP/OPS. Efforts in this direction will continue. Direct assistance to returnees from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran will be provided in conjunction with WFP and IOM.

15. The implementation of QIPs is a collaborative effort undertaken through agreements with national and international NGOs, governmental agencies, local communities and independent contractors in Afghanistan. Previous agreements have been signed with the International Rescue Committee, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Save the Children Fund-USA, OXFAM, MERLIN, Médecins sans Frontières

(MSF), the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee, line departments of the Government of Afghanistan and local implementing partners. These relations will be continued and strengthened to utilize fully the expertise and experience that NGOs in Afghanistan have acquired over the years.

Afghanistan Repatriation
(in thousands of dollars)

Country/ project/ area	1994 Expenditure	1995 Initial Programme needs as projected at 1/6/94	1995 Revised Programme needs as projected at 15/5/95	1996 Initial Programme needs as projected at 15/5/95
Afghanistan	5,622.4	9,030.3	16,340.9	8,519.1
Iran(Islamic Rep.of)	5,664.1	13,386.4	15,867.1	15,744.0
Pakistan	2,271.2	5,877.7	5,987.1	5,557.4
Regional projects	16.1	-	-	-
Headquarters	2,443.5	2,738.4	2,926.6	4,121.2
Total	16,017.3	31,032.8	41,121.7	33,941.7

B. Western Sahara

16. UNHCR has monitored attentively the progress of the implementation of the United Nations settlement plan for Western Sahara and has undertaken a number of activities to prepare for the repatriation of refugees.

17. On 28 August 1994, the Identification Commission of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) launched the identification and registration operation of potential voters. From 10 to 14 November 1994, UNHCR joined a mission of a United Nations Department of Peace-Keeping Operations technical team which visited the area of operations of MINURSO.

18. Then in February 1995, following the Secretary-General's report of 14 November 1994 and subsequent Security Council resolution 973, a UNHCR technical team visited various sites and potential repatriation locations in the Territory, as well as the Tindouf camps, to collect necessary technical information for the updating of the 1991 UNHCR plan for repatriation.

19. Further to this mission, a Logistics Officer has been working in the area of operations since mid-April 1995 to review and plan the logistical aspects of repatriation. In early June, an NGO team undertook a mission, at the request of UNHCR, to assess the water requirements for repatriation. Moreover, a UNHCR Liaison Officer is being assigned to Laayoune, as of mid-June, to consult closely with relevant units of MINURSO on all modalities related to the repatriation programme.

20. UNHCR will continue to prepare for the repatriation of refugees, in conformity with its mandate, within the United Nations settlement plan. Meanwhile a revised draft budget is being prepared for the repatriation of an estimated 105,000 persons.

21. In his report of 19 May 1995, the Secretary-General called on the parties to provide their full support to UNHCR in these preparations.

22. The Programme Delivery and Administrative Support expenditure in 1994 and requirements for 1995 were maintained at a very minimum level in order to cover the costs related to the preparatory missions.

Western Sahara Repatriation
(in thousands of dollars)

Country/ region	1994 Expenditure	1995 Initial programme needs as projected at 1/6/94	1995 Revised programme needs as projected at 15/5/95	1996 Initial programme needs as projected at 15/5/95
Morocco	104.1	130.0	165.2	168.5
Western Sahara	-	-	28,499.8	-
Total	104.1	130.0	28,665.0	168.5